

# Crile's Note Introduced in CBS Trial

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Four days before CBS interviewed Gen. William C. Westmoreland for its now disputed documentary on the Vietnam War, the producer, George Crile, wrote to Mike Wallace that "all you have to do is break General Westmoreland and we have the whole thing aced."

The note to Mr. Wallace, who conducted the interview on May 16, 1981, was introduced in Federal District Court in Manhattan yesterday by General Westmoreland's lawyer, Dan M. Burt, as he continued his effort to show that CBS had favored some participants in the broadcast while seeking to "catch" the general unprepared.

Mr. Burt suggested that, eight months before the documentary was aired in January 1982, Mr. Crile had ignored a "request" by General Westmoreland to "correct" a statement about enemy infiltration he made to Mr. Wallace during the three-hour on-camera interview.

But Mr. Crile — testifying for his sixth day at General Westmoreland's libel trial, where the producer, Mr. Wallace and CBS are among the defendants — insisted that the general had not made such a request and had been fully "equipped" to respond to the question when it was posed.

## 'We're Talking About a General'

"We're talking about a four-star general here," Mr. Crile told the jury in one of the long, detailed answers that have characterized his testimony. Neither Gen. George S. Patton nor Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower nor Gen. Douglas MacArthur would have needed any more preparation, Mr. Crile said.

The 39-year-old producer described his May 12, 1981, note to Mr. Wallace as "hyperbole" and said he had only wanted Mr. Wallace to have sufficient information for the interview at CBS studios in New York.

Mr. Crile, who had spoken by telephone to General Westmoreland at his home in Charleston, S.C., and — according to a May 11 note — told Mr. Wallace that he "seems not to be all that bright," testified yesterday that he was afraid the general would be evasive during the May 16 interview or try to "stonewall" Mr. Wallace by "denying the undeniable."

Mr. Crile was called as a "hostile" witness by Mr. Burt in the \$120 million suit over the 1982 documentary, "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception," which accused General Westmoreland's command of engaging in a "conspiracy" in 1967 to understate the size of the enemy. General Westmoreland led American forces in Vietnam from 1964 to 1968.

Mr. Burt, who has attempted to show that the allegation was false and that CBS either knew that or acted in "reckless disregard" of the truth, yesterday contrasted Mr. Crile's pre-interview treatment of General Westmoreland with that of Maj. Gen. Joseph A.

McChristian, who was chief of military intelligence in Vietnam until June 1967.

General McChristian was interviewed on March 19 and 20 at his home in Hobe Sound, Fla. And, eventually, he would be seen on the broadcast saying that he had informed General Westmoreland of a substantially higher estimate for Vietcong irregulars in May 1967 and that General Westmoreland had been "disturbed" by the figures.

## 'A Political Bombshell'

"And by the time I left his office," General McChristian recalled, "I had the definite impression that he felt if he sent those figures back to Washington at that time, it would create a political bombshell."

What happened to that estimate — how it was evaluated and whether the numbers were "covered up" — has become a key issue in the trial, now in its 11th week. General Westmoreland, in his suit, contends that CBS defamed him by saying that he had deceived President Lyndon B. Johnson and the Joint Chiefs of Staff about this estimate and other figures on enemy strength.

Yesterday, Mr. Burt introduced two letters that had been sent to General McChristian on Feb. 10, 1981, shortly after he was contacted about appearing on the documentary and asked for a précis of the program.

One of the letters was sent by Mr. Crile. The other was sent by Samuel A. Adams, a former Central Intelligence Agency analyst whose research provided the basis for the CBS documentary and who served as a paid consultant for the broadcast. Mr. Adams is also a defendant at this trial.

Mr. Adams's two-page letter outlined the specific "sequence of events" to be included in the documentary. In Mr. Crile's own two-page letter, he said that he had read "Sam's description of the documentary and it conforms to my own thinking on the story."

From "everything I can gather," Mr. Crile went on, General McChristian had done "his job." It was only after June 1, 1967, the producer wrote, that "the nature" of intelligence reporting on the enemy "changed dramatically and clearly for the worse."

The night before General McChristian's on-camera interview, Mr. Burt brought out Mr. Crile, accompanied by Mr. Adams, had dinner with the general in Hobe Sound and provided him with information supplied by other former intelligence officers they were interviewing.

"You didn't invite General Westmoreland to have dinner with you the night before the interview, did you, sir?" Mr. Burt asked.

Mr. Crile said he did not, and offered a lengthy explanation that General Westmoreland "in my opinion" was "going through the same process of attempting to deny the debates and battles that had taken place" over intelligence estimates in Saigon in 1967.

The producer was cut off by Judge Pierre N. Leval, who has often had to urge him to confine his answer to the question before him.

Judge Leval: "I think the question is whether you invited him to dinner the night before."

"At that point," the witness said, "I had had discussions with him and he, as I recall, was coming into New York that afternoon or late that afternoon and I did not — the answer is I did not have dinner with General Westmoreland the night before."

Mr. Crile broke into a grin, one of the few that have crossed his face while on the stand.

"I'm sorry," he said, as the spectators in the courtroom reacted with laughter.

Mr. Crile told Mr. Burt that the interview with General Westmoreland was probably in the late morning of May 16, 1981.

Q. And neither you nor Mr. Adams, to the best of your understanding, had met with General Westmoreland prior to this interview, correct, sir?

A. Well, just before the interview we talked for a while, but there was no meeting other than the interviews I had had with General Westmoreland on the telephone. There were several of them.

Mr. Crile said he had also sent General Westmoreland a two-page letter at the Plaza Hotel in New York, where he was staying on the night of May 15. Days earlier, the producer said, he read the letter to the general on the telephone.

The letter, which was introduced, summarizes five areas of interest for General Westmoreland's interview, but was not as explicit as the letters to General McChristian in February.

When Mr. Burt said that General Westmoreland had not been told, in advance of the interview, that "anyone was charging him with improper conduct," Mr. Crile explained that he would then have been forced into telling the general, in effect, "that he was not telling me the truth, that he was lying." But the "appropriate forum" in which to "challenge" the general, Mr. Crile said, was the on-camera interview.

Yesterday afternoon Mr. Burt played excerpts from an on-camera interview that Mr. Wallace had done for the documentary with Walt W. Rostow, President Johnson's national security adviser. Mr. Rostow warned Mr. Wallace that he was in danger of getting his facts wrong about this "rather complex war" and was "going to do great damage to the country."

When the half-dozen television sets in the courtroom were turned off, Mr. Burt pointed out that CBS "didn't use one second" of the interview in its broadcast.

"We, of course, drew on it," said Mr. Crile, whose testimony will continue today.